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**Title:** 'The anarchists' world cup': respectable protest and media panics.

**Abstract:** In 2005 225,000 people marched through Edinburgh enjoining the G8 to 'Make Poverty History'. The coalition's own assessment of their campaign highlighted the importance of media by focussing on the extent of media coverage. Media outlets, however, have their own agendas. Detailed analysis of newspaper coverage preceding the G8 Summit suggests a disjuncture between campaign objectives and media frames. This paper explores how far newspaper accounts of G8-related protests were 'framed' in terms of social movement aims, and how far in terms of anticipated violence. Our findings lead us to caution against an uncritical equation of 'coverage' and 'success', offering a more nuanced account of the interplay between social movements and media.

**Key Words:** Protest, Media, Newspapers, Moral Panic, Anarchists

## **‘The anarchists’ world cup’: respectable protest and media panics.**

***Michael Rosie & Hugo Gorringe***

‘Make Poverty History’ (MPH) is a UK-based international coalition of NGOs, faith groups and social institutions launched to place the issues of trade justice, debt and aid on the 2005 G8 summit agenda. In January 2006, marking one year of campaigning, the coalition released a report which, utilising the language of the advertising and media sector:

... analysed a sample of 1,200 cuttings from national newspapers, magazines, online and regional titles over a circulation of 50,000. The sample alone generated over 1 billion opportunities to see with an advertising value equivalence of £136.5 million. (MPH 2006)

MPH claimed to have established itself as “part of the news agenda” and that “50% of articles analysed included mention of at least one of the campaign’s three demands of trade justice, debt cancellation and more and better aid”. They concluded:

The Make Poverty History campaign was the biggest anti-poverty movement this country has ever seen and the response from the UK’s media was phenomenal. As well as raising awareness of the campaign’s demands, the media coverage has sparked popular debate on the policy changes needed and played a vital role in mobilising millions of people to take action against global poverty. (MPH 2006)

Given the difficulties faced by activists trying to influence the news agenda (Philo 1993, Hoynes 2005) MPH is justly proud of this achievement. Media institutions, however, are not neutral conduits. They have their own priorities and opinions - which may conflict with social movement (SM) objectives.

As part of our broader research<sup>1</sup> on the 2005 G8-related protests, this paper replicates the methodology of MPH’s media report and demonstrates that a less positive conclusion can be drawn from ‘opportunities to see’. We then explore how far newspaper accounts *prior* to the protests, in particular the keynote MPH rally, were ‘framed’ in

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<sup>1</sup> We carried out interviews and conversations with police officers and protest participants, collected a ‘snapshot’ survey of protestors on the largest demonstration, commissioned two polls of Scottish opinion and undertook a review of newspaper coverage. This data is complemented by participant observation at key protest sites and events in early July 2005. See Gorringe & Rosie (2006; 2008a; 2008b)

terms of social movement aims and how far in terms of anticipated violence and disorder. Broadly this illuminates a dynamic between protest 'event' and campaign 'causes' in media accounts. Analysis of newspaper coverage suggests a disjuncture between protest and some prominent media frames. These frames helped foment a localised moral panic over how far the right to protest could be, indeed *should* be, accommodated. Coverage of MPH needs to be assessed against this backdrop, and we caution against uncritical adoption of 'opportunities to see' (with its assumption that media coverage *per se* is positive) as a marker of movement 'success'.

### **Mediated Messages**

That Britain's "biggest anti-poverty movement" should mark a year's campaigning by claiming media 'success' is unsurprising. De Jong *et al* argue that:

... politics is communication: politicians' pronouncements, terrorists' bombs and peaceful protest alike are geared to ways of communicating with people. All political conflict takes place largely within and through organised media of communication. (2005a:1)

Likewise, as Gamson notes, "the mass media arena is the major site of contests over meaning because all of the players in the policy process assume its pervasive influence – whether it is justified or not" (2004:243). Sympathetic media coverage can increase mobilisation in 'a self-reinforcing upward spiral' (Kolb 2005: 101): mobilisation wins positive coverage which in turn assists in further mobilisation, and so on. Increasingly, then, organisations from trans-global corporations down to the humblest local campaign attend to their 'communication strategy', striving to become 'media-savvy'. Timms, for example, describes how the World Development Movement (WDM) routinely logs "press coverage" recording "media 'hits'" - the number of items in which they are mentioned. Success in securing exposure means WDM "is widely seen as punching above its weight" (Timms 2005:125). Activists recognise that media attention can be captured by "media stunts" (Timms 2005:126-127), "bold and creative" protests (Gaber & Willson 2005:104); or "image events" (Delicath & DeLuca 2003). For MPH this meant celebrity-led advertising and the sale of white campaign wristbands culminating when a white-clad 'human wristband' encircled central Edinburgh in July 2005. MPH peppered its campaign with 'image events' including the visit of 600 female clergy to Downing Street, the distribution of hard-hitting and star-studded films, and the exhortation to buy fair-trade underwear

and declare 'Pants to Poverty'.<sup>2</sup> As Nash (2008:167) notes, MPH "took place not just *through* but *in the media*". A deliberate strategy of seeking popular impact through the 'mainstream' media requires that the impact of that strategy is very carefully assessed.

Reliance on stunts, celebrity, and 'photo-opportunity' recognises that much of the media give preference to the spectacular over the mundane. Whilst this offers opportunities to obtain coverage it may come at a cost. Put bluntly, *events* garner immediate and wide coverage, whilst underlying trends, ideas, campaigns or *causes* are largely ignored (cf. Philo 1993). There is an inherent danger that the more spectacular the stunt, the higher profile the celebrity, the more news coverage a campaign wins - but the more the underlying causes of the campaign are obscured.

Where campaign 'success' is measured by quantity of media coverage, debates over quality are marginalized. The language of *opportunities to see* and *media hits* might imply that even bad news has value. Sarah Berger noted that the peaceful intentions of G7 protestors in Genoa were "overtaken" by a violent minority. Though opposed to violence, Berger noted that it had:

... attracted enormous media attention around the world. Scenes of rioting and mayhem dominated the television screens, yet the coverage was not all sensationalist and hostile. It included extensive analysis of neo-liberalism and the underlying causes of debt amongst the world's poorest countries. ... I have reluctantly concluded that it seems necessary to have both the threat and reality of violence and property destruction and even possible loss of life, in order to force our agenda for a fairer world onto the international stage. (2005:87)

For some, then, a realisation that media attention is focussed upon spectacle has meant an accommodation (if not uncritical acceptance) of violence within the protest *repertoire*. As Gamson & Wolfsfeld note, "Burning buildings and burning tires make better television than peaceful vigils and orderly marches" (1993:125). However, this accommodation begs important questions not least what proportion of coverage needs to be other than 'sensationalist and hostile' to constitute 'success'. Berger's reluctant conversion raises the crucial issue of whether and how resolutely non-violent campaigns such as MPH are framed or interpreted through the media's understanding and use of

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/2005/index.shtml>;  
<http://www.pantstopoverty.com/>

prior events. Just as “politics is communication”, so too all communication *is political*:

Media and their sources frame the news agenda, structure the debate and create what we perceive as the reality in which we live. In this sense, news media play a hegemonic role in our society – their perceptions and interpretations of the world become common sense. However, this process is continuous and creative, not static and rigid ... It is this common sense that has to be both engaged with and challenged by those seeking to achieve social change. (de Jong *et al* 2005a: 6)

### **Media framing, media ‘bias’**

MPH argued for three key global reforms: ‘Trade Justice’; ‘Debt Cancellation’; and ‘More and Better Aid’ (MPH 2004). How far these themes were reported or discussed depended on how media accounts ‘framed’ the G8-related protests (on ‘framing’ see McLuhan 1960; Goffman 1974). Altheide defines media frames as “the focus, a parameter or boundary, for discussing a particular event. Frames focus on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and above all, how it will not be discussed” (1997:651). Gamson offers a useful definition of a discursive ‘frame’ and its effects:

Like a picture frame, it puts a border around something, distinguishing it from what is around it. A frame spotlights certain events and their underlying causes and consequences, and directs our attention away from others. Like a building frame, it gives shape and support. A frame organizes and makes coherent an apparently diverse array of symbols, images, and arguments, linking them through an underlying organizing idea that suggests what is at stake on the issue. (2004: 245)

Thus media frames affect which message gets across since they shape public discourse and delimit the boundaries of debate. Such frames vary, but McFarlane & Hay argue that ‘marginalising frames’ prevail in accounts of protest. These “emphasize violent crime, property crime and riots, carnivalesque and freakish aspects of protest, childish antics, and moral and social decay” (2003:218). This echoes longstanding claims that many media accounts frame protests within “deprecating themes” (Gitlin 1980:27). Earl *et al* (2004) note how frames establish a ‘hierarchy’ in which certain events or issues are more likely to gain coverage than others. This can feed into biases of ‘selection’ and ‘description’ in which certain events are either omitted or presented in a particular way.

Framing, as an issue of meaning, is contested between various actors and interests. The context within which such contests occur has been termed the 'discursive opportunity structure':

[This] is limited to the framework of ideas and meaning-making institutions in a particular society. It provides a similar tool for understanding why certain actors and frames are more prominent in public discourse than others. The mass media are clearly central to this meaning-making process, but they are only a part of the institutional and cultural structures that channel and organize discourse. (Feree *et al* 2002:62)

Gamson (2004:249) outlines several "especially difficult problems that social movements face in adapting their strategies" to this context. Two key issues relating to media coverage are dilemmas concerning *access* and the *need for validation*. Issues of *access* relate primarily to the 'standing' enjoyed by a SM, that is the extent to which it possesses "the status of a media source whose comments are directly or indirectly quoted ... [and] being treated as an agent, not merely as an object being discussed by others". The *need for validation* refers to the crucial importance of the mass media in taking the SM's message to the broader public, and the resultant temptation to assume that the "media spotlight validates their importance" (Gamson 2004:251,252)

Whilst there is little doubt that MPH enjoyed considerable 'standing' in the UK media, a plausible case can be made (not least through the campaign's credulous emphasis on advertising value equivalence) that their need for coverage over-rode attention to contests over meaning. Sensationalised themes were thus allowed to develop and come to frame the G8 protests, obscuring much of their intended message.

McFarlane & Hay's analysis of coverage of demonstrations in Seattle notes how SM accounts can sometimes fail to achieve positive coverage where other 'frames' dominate:

... protests were presented within an 'anarchy and violence' narrative structure in which repeated reference was made to property destruction by protestors, to their acts of violence, and to the presence of 'masked anarchists dressed in black'. (2003: 222)

Likewise, Murdock's study of a 1968 London anti-war rally found a media focus on 'militant extremists', 'anarchists' and anticipated violence which: "served to concentrate attention on the forms of actions to the neglect of underlying causes" (1973:160). Murdock argued this related primarily to journalistic expediency:

The need to render information intelligible to the reader means that ... news stories cannot be presented in a complete vacuum. The journalist must therefore situate the event within a framework ... already familiar to the reader. (1973:164)

Whilst the 1968 rally was 'situated' with reference to ('familiar') riots that year in Paris and Chicago, the proposed G8-related protests in Scotland (as we shall demonstrate) were situated largely against media accounts of Genoa, 2001. Kolb's (2005) suggestion of an 'upward spiral' is inverted here: media accounts fed off each other in the one-dimensional portrayal of the Genoa protests as violent. Within such accounts 'Genoa' offered:

... a single dramatic image which made immediate sense of an ambiguous situation. The news process therefore establishes its own links between situations, links not at the level of underlying structures and processes but at the level of immediate forms and images. Situations are identified as the same if they look the same. In this way news rewrites history for immediate public consumption. (Murdock 1973:165)

Despite Berger's optimism, Genoa's protests are not remembered for their underlying political and economic impulses:

For many observers, Genoa is synonymous with protest violence, a metonym evoking images of tear gas, burning cars, and black-clad protesters hurling stones and Molotov cocktails at heavily militarized riot police. (Juris 2005:413)

Mass media (like any other communicative form) necessarily employ short-hands, "working routines ... that allow the journalists to quickly identify and classify information and 'to package it for efficient relay to their audiences'" (Scheufele 1999:106, citing Gitlin 1980:7). Such 'working routines' assume that the imagined audience/readership has some degree of knowledge – however sketchy and incomplete – of background issues. "Events", as Gamson & Wolfsfeld note, "do not speak for themselves but must be woven into some larger story line or frame: they take on their meaning from the frame in which they are embedded" (1993:117). However, much news focuses on 'episodic' rather than 'thematic' issues (Iyengar 1991; Smith *et al* 2001). They report events rather than providing "information that contextualizes an issue or problem" tending to focus "more on general developments, trends, or conditions that contribute to problems" (Smith *et al* 2001:1404). As Smith *et al* note:



... social movements often seek *thematic* media attention to some broad social concern by generating an *episode* or event that may be newsworthy in itself. A successful effort requires that media coverage of the protest event focuses on the issues the movement seeks to address, rather than on the event used to attract media coverage. (2001:1404)

Crucial here are thresholds for 'success'. Gamson notes that "a demonstration with no media coverage at all is a non event .... No news is bad news", but cautions:

There is a danger that mere coverage becomes an end in itself rather than a means to gaining standing and greater prominence for one's preferred frame. Since the commercial media emphasize entertainment values relative to journalistic values, media strategies may try to satisfy these entertainment needs. (Gamson 2004: 252)

Thus it is not enough for a protest to 'make the news'. Success is better measured by how far (if at all) the event/campaign is treated thematically, drawing "attention to underlying themes of injustice, inequality, or oppression"; and to the extent coverage is transformed into "an 'acute' issue that demands urgent attention on a crowded social agenda". (Smith *et al* 2001:1404)

Understanding media coverage as 'thematic' or 'episodic' offers a more nuanced reading of movement impact than *advertising value equivalence*. In this light Berger's view that "both the threat and reality of violence" may be necessary to put global justice on a media agenda may be misplaced, indeed counter-productive. Violent incidents may "possess a drama ... perfectly suited to the punchy formulations of banner headlines and the photographic aesthetics of a double-page spread" (Flyghed 2002: 29), but such coverage is double-edged:

The presence of counter-demonstrators, arrests, and/or violence produced more reporting on the demonstration event itself and less attention to the issues at stake. These conditions also tended to produce news spin that favored authorities rather than demonstrators. (Smith *et al* 2001: 1415)

Ironically, then, militant groups who "stage spectacular violent performances, partly, to gain access to the mass media" allow the interests of the *status quo* (in the view of these same militants) to "manipulate violent images, decontextualizing and reinserting them

within narratives that frame protestors as dangerous criminals or terrorists.” (Juris 2005: 416).

In other words, emphasising the spectacular may ensure that the intent of the protestors is neglected or undermined. Juris notes that much protest violence is ‘performative’ rather than ‘senseless’, echoing radical anti-capitalist celebration of ‘targeted’, ‘disciplined’ and ‘sense-full’ violence (against, for example, multinational corporate chains).<sup>3</sup> That such nuanced readings of violent action escape media depiction is hardly surprising, especially when activist accounts simplistically distance themselves from ‘senseless’ violent acts (against public property or private homes and individuals). In such accounts *activist* violence is multifaceted and sophisticated, only degenerating where state actors initiate and encourage ‘thuggery’ (e.g. Berger 2005). Several accounts offer nuanced analyses of activist tactics whilst routinely describing police strategies as one-dimensional and brutal (e.g. Juris 2005, Anonymous 2004).

Such uncritical and uniform portrayals of police violence are echoed in claims of media bias. Juris, for example, describes a “state media strategy” (2005:424) adversely framing Genoa:

... dominant media frames skillfully de-contextualized and reinserted images of militant rebellion into a larger narrative of dreaded criminal, if not terrorist, deviance, threatening to alienate potential supporters and wrest legitimacy from the broader movement. At the same time, authorities used violent images to separate the ‘reasonable’ majority from the radical fringe, thereby hoping to steer activists in a more reformist, containable direction. (Juris 2005:428)

The conflation here of state and media – or at least their immediate interests – seems unhelpful, as does the implication that the media deliberately (*skillfully, reinserted*) distort ‘facts’. As Murdock observed: “It is all too easy to look for a conspiracy” (1973:158). Media institutions are undoubtedly “enmeshed in the present economic and political system” with a “vested interest in the stability and the continuing existence” of that system (Murdock 1973:158). However, this ‘coincidence of interests’ is cross-cut by an ethos (not always successfully defended) of journalistic autonomy; and by a range (albeit limited) of political perspectives and interests within the media (cf. Philo 1993).

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<sup>3</sup> See, e.g., the Wombles’ *Ten theses about violence in anti-capitalistic demonstrations* <http://www.wombles.org.uk/g8/10theses.php>. See also Anonymous (2004).

Problems for activists arise in that whilst banal routines of campaigning fail to capture media attention a stunt or violent protest may do so. This can produce a vicious circle whereby ‘everyday protests’ increasingly fail to achieve the protestors’ publicity aims (Juris 2005: 416), perpetuating a pursuit of spectacle which falls prey to the episodic coverage dictated by a limited ‘media attention cycle’ (Earl *et al* 2004: 70). Juris argues that “social movement struggles are largely waged through media wars of symbolic interpretation” (2005:416). This being the case, the reliance on spectacle undermines social movement agendas.

Protest *success* comes to be defined in terms of spectacle, but the dominant frames and images of protest focus upon (actually relatively rare) violent events. Furthermore, media focus on violence fosters a “protest paradigm” within which “protestor voices [are] delegitimized, marginalized and demonized” (McFarlane & Hay 2003: 212). As Flyghed notes:

These non-representative events are drummed into our consciousness ... and are normalised so that they turn into perceptions of an ever-present threat. There is often what might almost be termed a demonisation of such threats. (2002: 37)

### **‘Genoa’, ‘anarchists’, moral panics**

Claims of ‘demonisation’ invoke Stanley Cohen’s 1972 study of *Folk Devils and Moral Panics*. Cohen argued that:

Societies appear to be subject, every now and then, to periods of moral panic. A condition, episode, person or group of persons emerges to become defined as a threat to societal values and interests; its nature is presented in a stylised and stereotypical fashion by the mass media; the moral barricades are manned ...” (2002: 1)

Moral panics “come in different sizes – some gripping only certain social categories, groups, or segments, others causing great concern in the majority” (Goode & Ben-Yahuda 1994a:157-158). Invocation of the ‘folk devil’ serves to curtail debate since it is predicated on stereotypical accounts of deviance. The folk devil - “deviant stereotypes identifying the enemy, the source of the threat, selfish, evil wrongdoers who are responsible for the trouble” (Goode & Ben-Yahuda 1994a:156) - by its very construction precludes discussion. Media play a crucial role in creating and reinforcing folk devils through systematic framing of coverage relating to particular groups. Such portrayals constitute a form of social control (cf. Della Porta & Diani 1999: 92). We argue that ‘Genoa’ and ‘anarchist’ have become media short-hands to invoke a ‘dangeous’

protest folk devil: “The mass media tend to construct militant protest in particular as dangerous and criminal”. (Juris 2005:423)

Goode & Ben-Yahuda note the centrality of media institutions to the construction of deviant groups through the recurrent coupling of particular groups with forms of anti-social behaviour:

Once a category has been identified in the media as consisting of troublemakers, the supposed havoc-wreaking behaviour of its members reported to the public, and their supposed stereotypical features litanised, the process of creating the folk devil is complete; from then on all mention of representatives of the new category revolves around their central, and exclusively negative features. (1994b:29)

Such havoc-wreaking was flagged in media accounts prior to the 2005 G8 Summit through the invocation of two stock terms – *anarchist* and *Genoa*. Here we wish to examine the ways in which such folk devils were invoked *despite* the fact that the key campaign – MPH – was resolutely opposed to confrontation and violence. Indeed there is a crucial difference between the 1968 anti-war rally described by Murdock (1973) and MPH. The 1968 rally was, as Thomas (forthcoming) illustrates, organized and led by the anti-systemic revolutionary left. MPH, on the other hand, was composed of trade unionists, religious groups and charities, and claimed UK government ministers amongst its very public supporters. Yet, as we demonstrate, this very ‘respectable’ coalition was framed in considerable part within a discourse of ‘extremism’ and violence.

### **“The anarchists’ World Cup”: Invoking Folk Devils**

There are plenty hoping to use the jamboree as an excuse to create as much bloody mayhem as they can. The G8 is the anarchists’ World Cup, their dream date. (Burnie, *Daily Record*, 2005)

Examining the various terms used to frame protests at the 2005 G8 Summit illuminates the nature of journalistic ‘working routines’. Since our concern is the way in which debate over Summit protests were framed, and the key themes and terms which contributed to that framing, we examine accounts in *anticipation* of the G8. Here we mirror the methodological approach of MPH by looking firstly at the extent to which the campaign gained coverage (that is, in their terms, *opportunities to see*). We do so by looking for ‘media hits’ (i.e. mentions) of both Make Poverty History and its three campaign slogans. In order to put these counts into some kind of comparative context, however, we have also

searched for other terms which might be relevant to the 2005 G8 Summit and associated protests. Our analysis focuses on the six months prior to the protests (i.e. 01 January to 30 June 2005) since we are primarily concerned with media framing of protest rather than the protests themselves. We limit our data to UK national, regional and local newspapers, although much analysis focuses on the Scottish editions of 'Fleet Street' titles, and on Scottish morning and evening newspapers. In this way 'national' and 'local' perspectives on global issues and events can be discerned.

To do this we used the LexisNexis<sup>4</sup> archive to conduct textual searches within 149 UK-based national and regional newspapers, ranging from the (Aberdeen) *Evening Express* to the *Yorkshire Post*. Whilst we are aware of the limitations of media indexing systems (cf. Earl *et al* 2004), LexisNexis allowed us to study a wider selection of newspapers than we would have otherwise been able to capture. The extent to which certain terms were deployed suggests that violence and disorder were, from the outset, central themes in the press imagination. By contrast, underlying issues of *why* groups were planning to protest were marginalized, often absent. Further, small radical groups such as the *Dissent! Network* garnered, proportionate to the number of people they actually mobilised, far more coverage than MPH.

Our initial search identified 6,203 articles between 01 January and 30 June 2005 containing the reference term 'G8' within either its headline or the full body of text. Within this sub-sample, we searched for articles containing the following terms:

- ❑ **Gleneagles, Climate change** (location for the 2005 Summit and one of the three key themes to be discussed at the 2005 Summit the others being poverty in Africa and international debt)
- ❑ **Okinawa, Genoa, Kananaskis, Evian, Sea Island** (locations of G8 Summits 2000-04)
- ❑ **Make Poverty History** and its three key slogans: ***Trade Justice; Drop the Debt, More and Better Aid***<sup>5</sup>.
- ❑ **Live8, Madonna, Long Walk, Bob Geldof** (Live8 was a musical campaign – loosely associated with MPH – featuring artists like Madonna, and with planned events such as the 'Long Walk To Justice' fronted by celebrities including Geldof)
- ❑ **Anarchist(s); Anarchy; riot; violent/violence; chaos; disorder**

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<sup>4</sup> <http://web.lexis-nexis.com/xchange-international/> Our original analysis was completed in December 2006.

<sup>5</sup> To capture reformulations of MPH's slogans we included 'debt cancellation', and both 'more aid' and 'better aid' in our searches. The incidence of the precise slogans were: 'Drop the Debt' (71) and 'More and Better Aid' (94).

The overall frequency of these terms is shown in table 1:

**Table 1 about here**

Utilising MPH's logic of 'media hits', three terms had the greatest impact. *Gleneagles* (location of the Summit) and *Make Poverty History* were ubiquitous, but the celebrity figure of *Geldof* had, in these crude terms, as much impact as the MPH coalition. None of MPH's three key aims achieved as many 'hits' as one of the items on the Summit agenda (*climate change*), and had no more presence within media output as *Live8* or *Madonna*. Further, more articles contained references to *riots*, *violence* and/or *anarchists* than to *fairer trade*, *debt cancellation*, or *improved aid*.

On MPH's own terms, therefore, the 'media-savvy' anti-poverty campaign was 'outbid' by themes of protest disorder and violence. This can be seen in the fact that newspaper accounts were far more likely to invoke *Genoa* than any other recent Summit. Summits at which there was little by way of violent protest – *Okinawa*, *Kananaskis*, *Sea Island* – were rarely mentioned.

### **Unmasking the Devil**

It is not enough, however, simply to show that certain terms were used. Despite MPH's embracing of the logic of 'opportunities to see' it is imperative to see just *how* terms were used. As a corrective to analyses focusing on the undifferentiated *positives* of 'media hits', this discussion foregrounds the way in which movement messages may be neutralised or undermined. Here we wish to highlight the negative terms used to discuss activism and illustrate how these came to frame accounts of the upcoming protests.

As we might expect, the presentational style of negative terms varied across newspaper type. For example, the tabloid *Sunday Mail*<sup>6</sup> ran an extensive story in January 2005 under the lurid headline "Ready to Riot G-Hate: Anarchists stage secret talks to plot chaos at Gleneagles", accompanied by violent images from Genoa:

Anti-capitalist campaigners have called a secret meeting to plot tactics for violent protests at the G8 summit in Scotland. An umbrella coalition called *Dissent* are staging the talks in Germany and invited hard-line activists from across Europe. Organisers of the anarchist group want to create an elite corps of 'experienced activists' to lead thousands of demonstrators when world leaders arrive at Gleneagles. They will also be training medics to deal with

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<sup>6</sup> Scotland's best selling Sunday title with a circulation of almost 500,000.

their wounded. They have told activists their aim is the 'total disruption' of the Gleneagles summit. (McDonald, *Sunday Mail*, 2005)

Note here the elision of 'anti-capitalist campaigners' with 'anarchist', and the militarised language ('elite corps'; 'wounded' rather than injured). Some lines later the article notes:

More than 10,000 police will be drafted in during the meeting of leaders of the world's richest nations. A total air exclusion zone will be set up over central Scotland and RAF jets are being put on stand-by for the two-day conference in July. Police want to avoid a repeat of the riot at the G8 summit in Genoa in 2001, which led to the killing of one protester by an armed policeman. (McDonald, *Sunday Mail*, 2005)

Again militarisation: police 'drafted in', fighters patrol the skies. Noticeably it is the *police* who wish to avoid any 'repeat of ... Genoa', not the 'anarchists':

Yesterday, an Edinburgh spokesman for *Dissent* gave a chilling warning about their plans. He said: 'It is a very violent world and these people are using it to maintain their power, so we won't hesitate to use the same weapons. The focal point might be the summit but, unlike other summits, there are a lot of other cities involved, which gives us access to a lot of opportunities'. (McDonald, *Sunday Mail*, 2005)

The article mixed potent and sensational ingredients. Supposed plans were framed in militarised, secretive and conspiratorial terms with activists – anarchists – determined to produce violence ("we won't hesitate"). The account fed into contemporary fears of terrorism and emphasised the un-knowability of where and how the anarchists would strike. Yet the article contained another story, not immediately discernible, in terms of a key, though implicit contradiction.

How was it that a 'secret meeting' was known to, and reported by, a Scottish tabloid newspaper? And how secretive and dangerously unpredictable is a network with an accessible and accommodating "Edinburgh spokesman"? At no point did the article consider, let alone explore, *Dissent's* motivations. As Gamson & Wolfsfeld note, "It is not simply that certain ideas are unpopular – some are rendered invisible" (1993:119).

It might be objected that this story is an unrepresentative and isolated example of tabloid sensationalism. In fact other tabloids carried many similar stories. Consider the following from the *Scottish Sun*, headlined 'The Gr8 War':

Scotland could become a battleground as protesters finalise their plans to wreck the G8 summit. Previous summits have ended in bloody - and deadly - clashes with police. Anti-capitalist websites give a shocking insight into their plans, which include flaming barricades and the storming of banks. (Cox & Donohoe, *Scottish Sun*, 2005)

Here again 'secretive' radicals and militarised themes add spice. The *Daily Mail* also found an 'anarchist' insider:

Anarchists bent on bringing mayhem to Edinburgh are in the final stages of planning ... Anarchist leaders drew up plans at a secret meeting in Glasgow last weekend organised by the radical *Dissent* collective. An insider said: 'The idea is now to use the nice fluffy middleclass war on poverty in Africa as a cover for some more direct mayhem.' A final planning meeting by the group is expected to take place this weekend at Edinburgh University. (*Daily Mail* 2005b)

Note here the inherent danger that 'respectable' protests will be cynically manipulated by those "bent on bringing mayhem". Again note that the location of the 'final planning meeting' is not only known to the *Daily Mail* in advance but proved to be one of Edinburgh's major institutions. The *Sunday Express* also 'infiltrated' an activist training session, uncovering alarming plots:

Last week, a *Sunday Express* reporter infiltrated one of the groups during a three-day training session to prepare demonstrators for violence. He was told extremists including the Wombles and Black Bloc hardliners are determined to cause a repeat of the violence in Genoa four years ago, when one protester was killed. (Stanley & McKeown, *Sunday Express*, 2005)

Such accounts both disproportionately focus on organisations on the – relative – fringes of the 2005 G8 protest constituency, and *de-politicise* radical organisations and protests, condensing them into 'moments of violence'. The point of the protests, the issues being discussed at the various meetings, the range of organisations and individuals raising issues are not marginalised – they are absent. Demonisation is complete when successive articles implicate such organisations in the death of a



protestor in Genoa, a frame suggesting a wanton disregard for human life.

Protest politics in such accounts are stripped of *politics* and become synonyms for violence or, activities which - inadvertently or otherwise - lead to violence. Such accounts are resolutely 'episodic' rather than 'thematic'. Nor was such sensationalism limited to the tabloid press. That 'quality' newspapers utilised such short-hands can be seen in the following headlines:

***Figure 1 about here***

Whilst sensationalism was less marked in the 'quality' press, it was by no means absent. In May 2005 "a secret meeting of anti-capitalist activists ... was infiltrated by an undercover *Sunday Times* reporter" who revealed the "G8 chaos plans of anarchists". The reporter "spent six months posing as an anarchist to discover a sinister plan to unleash chaos on Scotland during the G8 summit" claiming to "breach the inner sanctum of the British anti-capitalist movement, becoming privy to some of its most sensitive plans". The investigation concluded that the anarchists were "determined to wreak havoc" (Lamarra, *Sunday Times*, 2005a & 2005b). Similarly, the *Times* went "Inside the secret world of anarchists" to the 'Festival of Dissent' where:

A remote farm in the Lanarkshire countryside was transformed ... into a city of well laid-out army tents and marquees resembling a military encampment. The military aspect was no accident. This was a "war summit", where about 300 anarchists - some dressed in urban guerrilla garb in freezing temperatures - had gathered to draw up plans to paralyse Scotland during the G8. (Luck, *The Times*, 2005)

In penetrating this "secretive group of militants" the *Times* uncovered "the nature of many of its plans - and the willingness of some militants to resort to violence in their determination to disrupt the summit" (Luck, *The Times*, 2005).

Such stories reprised the sensationalism of tabloid accounts. Again, however, the master theme of 'secrecy' was undermined by the apparent ease journalists had in finding and infiltrating 'secret' meetings and organisations. In fact most of the 'secret' meetings were nothing of the sort. Take, as one example, the 'Festival of Dissent', described by Luck (*The Times*, 2005) as a "secretive group of militants" meeting on a "remote farm". The gathering was held conveniently close to a major motorway junction and was widely publicised. The organisers issued a

press release and made arrangements for a 'press reception'<sup>7</sup>. As Lamarra (*Sunday Times*, 2005b) later conceded, the 'Festival of Dissent' was "crawling with journalists".

The folk devil, clearly, is well established. The efficacy of the short-hand is such that sensationalist stories - so long as they conform to and confirm established stereotypes - can be constructed on the thinnest of evidence. An incessant association of 'anarchism' with violence facilitates moral panic about 'illegitimate', 'unauthorised' and 'unjustified' forms of political action.

### **Ready for a riot?**

If sensationalist themes obscured the ideological motives of radical groups, the constant invoking of Genoa, chaos and violence also characterized coverage of 'mainstream' protest organisations including MPH.<sup>8</sup> Such groups negotiated with police and local authorities and their motives (even where media sources were unsympathetic) were seen as legitimate. Nevertheless, much media coverage focused on the likelihood that violent groups would hijack them. Within this theme were assumptions that even the well-intentioned could, within 'the crowd', lose control of themselves. Cox & Donahoe (*Scottish Sun*, 2005), for example, cited one senior police officer warning that "it only takes a handful of lunatics to turn the mood of these big events".

Those newspapers most sympathetic to MPH carefully tried to separate 'legitimate' and 'extremist' protest:

It should be an honour for Scotland to host the G8 Summit. It ought to be an opportunity for ordinary people to change the course of history by making their voices heard ... But this huge event will also attract lowlife thugs intent on violence. Anarchist groups from London and further afield are targeting Edinburgh and they are determined to cause trouble. If there is any violence, it will do nothing to help the cause of Africa or end poverty ... That is what the G8 is really about. That is what peaceful protest can help achieve. And we cannot let extremists bent on rioting deflect from that task. (*Daily Record* 2005a)

The emphasis here is on "voices heard" – violent protest is not only abhorrent in itself (the strategy of "lowlife thugs"), it drowns out

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.nadir.org/nadir/initiativ/agp/resistg8/press/festival.htm> (accessed 16 June 2008)

<sup>8</sup> For more on the consensual nature of MPH and other protests, see Gorrington & Rosie (2006).

‘legitimate’ concerns and ‘real’ issues. The *Record* consistently backed MPH and further editorialised:

The Make Poverty History movement needs committed, peaceful demonstrators. What it can do without are anarchist head-bangers determined to run riot through Edinburgh next week. Anyone thinking about using the G8 for their own political ends ... should realise that any trouble will detract from a sincere call to world leaders to do more to alleviate suffering in Africa. (*Daily Record* 2005b)

Other titles went further, arguing that the threat of infiltration rendered ‘legitimate’ protest *irresponsible*. The *Daily Mail* argued:

There should always be room in a mature democracy for law-abiding citizens to alert the leaders of the world's most affluent nations to issues surrounding Third World debt. But only the most naive among them can be ignorant of the fact that these peaceful marches are ripe for the hijacking by people hell bent on operating outside of the law and outside of the normal structures of democracy ... Try asking the battle-scarred citizens of Gothenburg, Seattle and Genoa if they now think peaceful protest at this event is possible. (*Daily Mail* 2005a)

Moral panic is evident: ‘extremist thugs’ not only deny justice to those in abject poverty, they threaten to *infect* legitimate protest, turning ‘law abiding citizens’ into criminal deviants. The logical conclusion was that peaceful G8-related protest was impossible: violence was inevitable.

Premonitions of impending violence were most pronounced in the Scottish press, particularly in Edinburgh’s Scotsman Group titles (the *Scotsman*, *Evening News*, and *Scotland on Sunday*). Key themes in this coverage were the familiar ones of ‘anarchists’, ‘plots’, ‘violence’ and ‘chaos’:

### ***Figure 2 about here***

Scotsman Group titles questioned the motives of even the most respectable of protestors. *Scotland on Sunday* recognised that reasonable people “continue[d] to feel a deep and committed sympathy for Africa”. However:

It is high time grown men and women recognised the distinction between a compassionate, concrete and focused plan to relieve poverty in Africa and an emotional spasm - which is what the

organisers of the G8 protests are indulging in. (*Scotland On Sunday* 2005)

The paper criticised what they saw as an overly accommodating approach by the authorities and, in particular, Lothian & Borders Police:

Even the forces of law and order have been seduced by the rhetoric of protest, as evidenced by the claim of ... the assistant chief constable ... that all in Edinburgh agree with the aims of the protesters. His presumption is incredible. It is quite possible to believe that Africa needs assistance without backing an idiotic plan for far more people than is safe to descend on Scotland's capital resulting, at best, in massive disruption, and at worst, serious disorder. (*Scotland on Sunday* 2005)

#### **“Lurid coverage is itself a threat to public order”**

Moral panics, as Goode & Ben Yahuda (1994b) note, may be localised. Whilst the *Scotsman* Group set itself up as the guardian of the moral order in a “world heritage city”, even its coverage was occasionally more measured. The *Evening News*, for example, reported that: “Detectives have been monitoring extremist groups for months and discovered no evidence of plans to organise riots or other large-scale disorder” (Stow, *Evening News*, 2005). One *Scotsman* columnist warned that press coverage:

... raises some profound and disturbing questions about the way our society is changing; about when, for instance, we became so terrified of dissent and so wary of free speech that even an event as respectable as the Make Poverty History march ... has to be treated as a major threat to public order ... we have to be clear that people have a right to demonstrate peacefully, and that that right should be celebrated in a free society. (McMillan, *Scotsman*, 2005)

Yet despite evidence that the police had no expectation of ‘riots’, and despite the willingness of some to address mounting press hysteria, headlines continued to fuel fears. In June the *Scotsman* claimed that officers policing G8-related protests would be armed with ‘taser stun guns’ (McDougall, *Scotsman*, 2005). Senior police officers publicly denounced this “erroneous reporting”, and warned of “a dangerous form of journalism that raises the fears of the public and those people who wish to protest lawfully” (ACPOS 2005). Likewise, as one of our police

respondents made clear, such coverage raises fears and expectations amongst the police as well (see Gorringe & Rosie 2008b). A senior Lothian & Borders officer reminded the press:

We do not have water cannons. We do not use plastic bullets. The equipment being issued to officers is the standard baton, CS canister, shield capability and protective padding. We do not use firearms. Our officers are well trained in keeping public order of a violent nature. They deal with incidents of this type every Friday and Saturday night. (Quoted in Lindsay, *Press & Journal*, 2005)

The appeal of the signifiers ‘anarchy’ and ‘violence’ outweighed such assurances. In the absence of evidence, or even *with* evidence to the contrary, speculation sufficed:

There has been widespread speculation that the police will take the continental approach to riot control and deploy water cannon, plastic bullets, tear-gas and baton guns. A four-mile ring of steel will surround the 850-acre Gleneagles estate. (Lamarra, *Sunday Times*, 2005b)

The media, of course, is hardly monolithic and, confronting the “full panic mode”, one of Scotland’s more thoughtful columnists warned:

We all know what it is really about: selling newspapers. G8 chaos is what Edinburgh people want to read about. But that doesn't make it right ... Newspapers have a responsibility that goes beyond the next day's fish suppers. Of course public safety is a legitimate issue. But relentless forecasts of imminent violence tend to attract precisely the violent elements you don't want to come while deterring peaceful demonstrators. Lurid coverage is itself a threat to public order. Remember that if the bottles fly in July. (MacWhirter, *Herald*, 2005)

### **Getting the message across?**

Few bottles did, in fact, fly and the MPH march passed without a single protest-related arrest (Gorringe & Rosie 2006). Yet much media coverage focussed instead on the star studded Live8 concerts or repeated predictions of forthcoming chaos. As a media-friendly ‘spectacle’, the symbolic ringing of Edinburgh’s city centre by hundreds of thousands of white-clad protestors fared poorly against Madonna, U2, and black clad anarchists.

The *Independent*, for example, declared 2<sup>nd</sup> July 2005 'Live8 Day', giving over that day's front page to Geldof's letter to G8 leaders (a missive that did not mention MPH by name). The *Sunday Mirror*, on 3<sup>rd</sup> July, declared Live8 'The Greatest Show On Earth: The Eighth Wonder of The World', whilst the *Sunday Express* feature on Edinburgh said: "Clashes fail to Spoil the Big Day in Scotland". These 'clashes' were a minor incident on the fringes of the MPH march: "at one point, 60 [anti-capitalist] protesters were said to have acted "aggressively" and confronted the police in the city centre but there were no arrests" (Paul, *Sunday Express*, 2005). The *Sunday Mail* also focussed on this minor incident under the misleading headline "Violent gangs split from anti-poverty march to battle cops on side streets" (Hamilton, *Sunday Mail*, 2005). The *Daily Mail* headlined "Anarchists storm riot police barricade", the paper warning that similarly "violent scenes are expected to be repeated many times over the next few days" (*Daily Mail* 2005c). Press attention was also focussed on forthcoming protests, one newspaper highlighting contingency plans for fatalities at Gleneagles (*Mail On Sunday* 2005).

MPH claimed that: "the response from the UK's media was phenomenal". Their campaign undoubtedly won *coverage*, but it is not at all clear that this "sparked popular debate" in the way the campaign claimed (see MPH 2006). As we have shown, MPH's numerical focus on 'opportunities to see' ignores both the context within which opportunities are *seen* and the exposure accorded to other more negatively-charged and sensationalised aspects of protest. At best, we contend, it is methodologically flawed and offers an overly limited and simplistic barometer of movement 'success'.

Despite its 'respectable' credentials, its unwavering commitment to peaceful protest, and its sophisticated campaigning the dominant media frames were generated not by thematic interest in world poverty and global justice, but by a media desire for spectacle. MPH's strategy of using celebrity sponsors fed media appetite for stardom, but the campaign also suffered from a pre-existing frame for G8-related protest environments – the working routines of 'anarchists' and 'Genoa'. These short-hands were ubiquitous in the lead up to the 2005 protests and fostered a localised moral panic despite the actual character of the MPH coalition.

It is difficult to imagine a global justice movement further removed from the world of dangerous, conspiratorial revolutionaries than MPH. A coalition of high street charities, NGOs and religious organisations, MPH persuaded establishment figures such as the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Scotland's First Minister to pledge their support. Yet in the media imagination the 'anarchist' folk devil proved irresistible. Social movements, rather than simply counting 'media hits' and 'opportunities

to see' need to think more deeply about the role of the media in creating, narrowing, or stifling debate. At the very least they need to consider the 'quality' and contexts of their hard won 'opportunities to be seen'. Media 'hits' may reflect the 'standing' of a campaign or movement, but that movement must also be attentive to how far their own 'preferred framing' is prominent in media discourse and, crucially, "the extent to which the *content* of the coverage presents the group in such a way that it is likely to gain sympathy from relevant publics" (Gamson & Wolfsfeld 1993:121 – our emphasis).

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